

Double indemnity

WISHBONE ASH:
"There's The Rub"
(MCA)

WHEN MCA pulled the Wishbone, their wish came true.

They got a safe, hard working, hit rock band, happy to toil away at the same successful formula without protest. And since the formula's a beaut, everyone's happy.

The initial concept was simple. One talented axeman can mean guaranteed chart longevity for even the most pedestrian band — problems such as the occasional mental and physical breakdown notwithstanding.

Put two talented pickers in the same four-piece, sparking ideas off each other, and you might as well press the platinum platters at the outset.

The Ash used to mean Andy Powell and Ted Turner, but Ted's fled, to be replaced by one Laurie Wisefield. If you can hear the difference, you've been reading your NME Guitar Book better than most.

Wisefield proves a more than adequate Turner re-tread, taking all those instrumental Z-bends at high speed without losing his grip. Guitar freaks can safely invest in Ash Model II. You get the usual smooth musical ride.

If you want to get straight to the nitty-gritty, the album's final cut "F.U.B.B." is a classic Ash work-out, a most pleasing display of fretboard gymnastics, performed with finesse and neatness, not a rumped gymnastic in sight. "F.U.B.B." apparently stands for "Fucked Up Beyond Belief", but why the Ash should want to call their music anything so aggressive is unclear.

The point about their music is its polite restraint. After all, they doubtless reason, expertise gets a little ground down by an excess of heavy metal. Trick-cyclists look out of place driving steam-rollers.

"F.U.B.B." has as delicate an air as is possible with so many watts flying around. The band's

twin leads interlock with the shyness of gay stags rubbing antlers.

The cut even maintains its politeness when one of the guys steps daintily onto a wah-wah pedal and the rhythm section sets aside its cucumber sandwiches for something of a thrash.

"F.U.B.B." has a certain majesty, about it, soaring to a climax that's handled with taste, like a royal orgasm.

The Ash aim to produce intriguing sounds without wandering too far from the safe haven of the identi-kit rock lineup. They also do it without punching holes in your eardrums. And, by and large, they succeed. This is a very amiable set that demands your attention without rattling your teeth.

For those who'd find two sides of guitar convolutions daunting, the Ash make suitable provision. He's called Martin Turner and he belongs to

one of the two great schools of English rock vocalists — more your Jack Bruce quality warble than your Robert Plant death throes.

Martin puts in a typically unpretentious performance on the other five cuts, notably "Silver Shoes" and "Hometown". It can't be said that the melodies cling like limpets to your memory, but the experience is agreeable enough when you're undergoing it, and that's the main thing.

Wishbone Ash show what a rock band can do with a little ingenuity and respect for their listeners' boredom threshold. There's no need to risk a musical rupture every time a plectrum's lifted.

Finally, something should be said about the album's producer. He's called Bill Szymczyk, which means he's in the unusual position of having no vowels in his surname; not every band has a producer who's been disemvowelled. Bob Edmunds



The twin leads of W. Ash — what's that about a royal orgasm, lads?

how come he wears the most ludicrous trousers in the whole of rock and roll?

Well, Pancho, it may just have something to do with the fact that he's just issued an album of the most refreshing and innovatory guitar music that I've heard in years.

"Guitar Solos" may not be a Whole New Approach to guitar playing, but I can quite truthfully say that in Cthulhu knows how long of listening to famed axemen, I ain't never hoid anything like it.

Frith's approach is simultaneously cunningly naive and highly sophisticated.

Somehow, this ill-clad oaf has managed to dispose most of the accepted precepts about what constitutes great guitar playing — i.e. left hand on the fretboard and right hand picking somewhere down by the bridge — and yet absorb most of the stylistic and technical innovations that he's written about so learnedly in these pages.

Frith is a Compleat Guitarist in that he plays all of the instrument. Any part of the guitar which can be used to produce sound is so used, with the end result that it ends up hardly sounding like anything that you're accustomed to hear from the instrument. As he points out in the liner note, it's all natural sounds from guitar and amp — apart from a little bit of fuzz-box here and repeat echo there.

Some of the effects are obtained by using both hands on the fretboard and miking up the neck.

At other times he holds down notes with crocodile clips, or uses a prism as a slide, working on the relationship between the string distance from finger to nut as well as finger to bridge.

The bits that stand out in the

mind after several listens are the rolling, asymmetrical figure that constitutes "Hello Music" right up front on side one track one, and the extraordinary beauty of several of the passages on the extremely long "No Birds" that takes up the last quarter of the album.

Frith's approach to the guitar is totally revolutionary, and "Guitar Solos" is thus a totally revolutionary album, being a basic exposition of the idiosyncracies and techniques of its maker.

Apart from anything else, it certainly whets the appetite for Henry Cow's next album, on which Frith will hopefully integrate this approach into a group context in a more fully realised manner than he has on the past recordings.

"Guitar Solos" is a source point for many future experiments both by Frith himself and, one hopes, other guitarists who've been looking for some new ways to approach their instrument.

As such, it's an undeniable landmark in the history of rock guitar, and it is to be desired that Frith's fellow guitarists will be prepared to regard it as such and to pick up on the possibilities that he has opened up.

This album is recommended to anybody with even the slightest interest in guitar playing.

Let's just hope that no-one's decided to emulate Frith's taste in trousers, though. That alone could set rock and roll back twenty years.

Charles Shaar Murray

VARIOUS ARTISTS:
"Stars Of The Apollo"
(CBS)

YOU KNOW THE scene.

Bogart's playing his Sam Spade Private Investigator role

— all trenchcoat, trilby, and poker-face — and has just muscled open a door that didn't open to his knock. You know the moment he gets inside that he's going to find a stiff splayed out on the bathroom floor by the fact that the big brown bakelite radio in the corner is playing so loud. Too loud. Drowns the shots see.

Chances are what's playing is something like "Harlem Woogie" by Jimmy Johnson and his Orchestra or "When My Baby Left Me" by Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson with Cootie Williams and his orchestra, or indeed almost any track off the first three sides of "Stars Of The Apollo", practically all of which hail from the 'thirties and 'forties.

Most cuts are samplers of the sort of big band jazz that had them lindy-hopping at the black music halls during those decades, foremost amongst which has always been the Apollo, which therefore lends its name to this compendium of what *The Observer* recently conspired to call 'palaentological pop'.

We just call it music.

Famous bands like those of Earl Hines, Count Baise, Claude Thornhill, and Duke Ellington are all represented, as are many of the greats of female blues-singing, including Bessie Smith with "Gimme A Pigfoot", Billie Holiday with "Wherever You Are" and Sarah Vaughan with "Ain't Misbehavin'".

Side four adds some incongruities like Screamin' Jay Hawkins' R&B classic, "I Put A spell On You" from 1956 and an early (1964) Aretha track, "Evil Gal Blues."

Otherwise it makes ideal mood music for those whose fantasies extend to alligator shoes and zoot suit. Neil Spencer